Lettre du Père Lucien de LaRoche, Mission du Saint-Esprit, 19 Juillet 1713

(Recovered from the Oblate Archives, Québec City – Translated 1913)

To the Reverend Father-Superior,

House of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Québec.

Reverend and Beloved Father,

I write once more from the country of the Mistassins. The lake here stretches so wide that it seems a sea without salt, and at its centre rises a vast rock the people name Mištasiniy — The Great Stone. They approach it with silence, and none cast shadow upon it without prayer.

Two elders guided me there. One said the rock was once a man of power, the first teacher of their people. He was called Atâwêw — in their tongue, He Who Brings the Dawn. Though I may be misspelling the name all together as the sounds are difficult but it means what I stated. They tell that he walked among them in the earliest days, he came from the lake, healing the sick and lighting fires that never failed. When envy rose against him, he gave himself willingly to death, saying that his spirit would not depart but sleep within the stone to keep watch over them.

They believe that when the ice melts and one throws a pebble into the hollow at the base, a clear ringing answers from within. “That is his voice,” they said, “for when the world warms, he wakes.”

I told them of our Lord who likewise gave Himself for His people and who abides still in the living Bread. They listened gravely and said, “Then He has walked here also.” I dared not answer. For as the wind moved over the water, I thought I heard a faint sound from the stone — a hum as of breath returning.

I record this not to confound doctrine but to note a mystery that echoes our own: a Light who once came to men, died, and yet remains within the world He made. Perhaps Providence has carved in this wilderness another likeness of His Passion — for the rock, too, bears the wounds of fire and time, and still endures.

I remain, in humble obedience,

Your servant and son in Christ,

Fr. Lucien de LaRoche, S.J.

Mission du Saint-Esprit,

Lac Mistassini, this 19th day of July, 1713.

Translator’s Note — Québec City, 1913

The foregoing letter was found among a packet of unlisted papers in the Oblate archives at Pointe-Bleue. The handwriting matches that of Fr. Lucien de LaRoche, active in the Saguenay-Mistassini region between 1711 and 1715.

Scholars had long known the legend of Mištasiniy, the Great Rock, from later Cree informants; this appears to be its earliest European record. De LaRoche’s correspondence links the being Wâpanêw or Atâwêw we do not know the correct spelling but it means “He Who Brings the Dawn” with the spirit said to dwell in the stone, interpreting the story as a native remembrance of the Creator who once walked among them.

If his transcription is accurate, the theology implied is remarkable: light descending into water, taking form among humankind, surrendering itself, and abiding in stone as witness. In the priest’s words, “The Rock speaks still.”

The document remains one of the few 18th-century sources to record a parallel between the Christian Incarnation and an Indigenous teaching of divine presence on this continent.

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